

00:00

(This is Nancy Freeman on July 27th, 2005. I'm interviewing Philip Taylor in Bicknell, Utah. Let me just get started. You can tell me a little bit, Philip, about your educational background and where you grew up.)

I grew up in this valley. My educational, I graduated from Wayne High School here, attended two years junior college in St. George, Utah.

(What was your area of study there?)

Just general things. I didn't pursue any one thing. [pause] I didn't know what I wanted to do at that time.

(When you were growing up here, did you hunt and trap?)

Yes, I did. That's all I wanted to do was hunt, since the time I was old enough to remember.

(Did someone specific in your life hunt with you and teach you how to trap or those type of things?)

I had an uncle that taught me a little bit about trapping, not a lot. I didn't know a lot when I started on this department, but I had a good supervisor, Adria Ahlstrom, and then the assistant supervisor was Robert Oppenheimer. And they spent a lot of time with me, and they taught me a lot of things, real good.

01:43

(When did you start?)

1961.

(How did you get into it?)

Uh [pause] this area had a vacancy. The fellow died. I just put an application in. They come and interviewed me and put me on six months temporary, and at the end of the six months they put me on full-time.

(And you were hired by—?)

I was hired by Adria Ahlstrom. He was the district supervisor.

(And he was your supervisor? Or Bob Oppenheimer was your supervisor?)

Bob Oppenheimer was the assistant supervisor at that time, and then he took Adria's place.

(So you started in the '60s.)

'61.

('61. At that time, what was the primary thing that you did, what kind of control work, what kind of animal? Was there just one? Describe to me a little bit about what your work was.)

02:49

Well, most of the work was mountain lion work in this area. There was some coyote work, but we didn't have a lot of coyotes back in that time, because we were using a lot of poison. And a lot of the mountains that has coyotes in 'em today didn't have any coyotes on account of the poison. But we had lots of mountain lion. There was lots of depredation from mountain lion then.

(And what kind of poison were you using?)

1080 poison and strychnine.

(For the coyotes?)

Yes.

(Describe how the 1080 was put out.)

The sheep people gave us fat sheep in the fall and we injected the 1080, mixed it with water and injected it into the carcasses and put it out, and, and marked it and put signs out by it, and then in the spring we'd go pick it back up, what was left.

(Was that pretty effective?)

Real effective. It held the coyote population way down. There was just pairs here and there that—some of the adult pairs got to the point where they wouldn't eat it, but we held the population to—it was rare for people to see a coyote back in those days.

(When did you have to stop using 1080?)

1972, I think, under President Nixon, they stopped it.

(Did you notice an increase then?)

Ever since, [laughs] yes.

(What did you start to use then, after you couldn't use 1080?)

Well, they had an effective aerial program, helicopter program and fixed wing, both, and that was a big help.

(And they did it here, in this area, too?)

We did, yes.

(Were you a gunner?)

Just in the helicopter, is all. In the winter.

(What is the difference between being a gunner in the helicopter and the fixed wing? Was it different, do you think?)

04:49

Well, I—you probably had to be a little more skilled to ride the fixed wing, and then some of the guys, including myself would get a little airsick in the fixed wing plane, where I didn't in the helicopter.

(How long did you do the helicopter gunning?)

Well, most years for probably 20 years or so, I guess.

(Oh, really?)

But that was just in my area, my district.

(Was there a certain time?)

We called for that machine usually right after a snow in the winter, because we needed the fresh snow to track on, and we'd follow the tracks in the air until we found the coyotes. And we, usually, it was expensive, the machine was expensive. That was another reason we were real particular at the time we called and flew only serious places, sheep ranging, those kind of things.

(Did you have a ground crew for the helicopter?)

Sometimes. But sometimes in the high mountains the ground crew couldn't get up there on account of the snow where we were using it. We usually had somebody on the radio to keep track of us, though.

(Did you ever have any close calls in the helicopter?)

Not really, no, I didn't.

(Really! Oh, that's good. That's good. [pause] What district did you work in? Were you always here?)

06:28

Yes, I was. I worked the Fish Lake Mountains, the Parker Mountains, the Boulder Mountains, and the Henry Mountains.

(So you were always based out of Becknell?)

Well, I lived in Fremont until the last 10 years, which is a little town just up the valley here, eight miles or so.

(Did you ever do details any place else?)

Uh, yes, when I was hunting lion a lot, they sent me on problem places quite a bit around the state.

(For mountain lions?)

Yes.

(So you were their troubleshooter for mountain lions?)

Well, yes, I was for a while. I finally quit that. My first wife had cancer, and then my daughter had an accident, and between the two, I just couldn't be away from home a lot. So I had to kind of give that up. And they got another young guy, which is a real good, real good attitude to do it. So that's—

(I want to talk about mountain lions. You brought that up. When you first started to work here, in '61, in this area, how did you catch mountain lions?)

07:47

Well, most of the mountain lion was caught with hounds, with dogs. And, uh, when I started out, I really didn't realize how big a problem—they broke lots of sheep people out of the business.

(Really? Mountain lions?)

Yes, just because they make such big kills, and when they get up to 30% or 40% of their lamb crop, why, that was their profit gone. Over the years a lot of people that was in the business quit because of big mountain lion kills. But when I started out—and some of these problems I had, Bob come over and help me a little bit. [chuckles] He was pretty good, but I didn't think you could catch a lion unless you had snow. And that was about the only time that we used the dogs. We set traps occasionally, but it's hard to find a place to trap a mountain lion. And then there was another fellow by the name of Jim Morgan. You may know about Jim.

(Mm-hmm.)

He was—I was pretty close to Jim, and he'd come up and help me quite a bit. I got to where I watched his dogs work and catch a lion without snow, on the dry ground. I finally got into a strain of hounds of my own, and my hounds are pretty well known in the western states, that strain I had. I had that strain for 30 years. They're scattered all over the western states now. And I caught lots of lion. I'd like to think I was good at it. I went over the 500 mark when I finally quit. I lost track. That was about the end of my career with it. But I loved it. It was my life.

(What did you enjoy about trapping the mountain lion the most, or more than any other animal? Because it looks like you really enjoyed it.)

09:36

Well, I enjoyed the dogs, and the superior—to watch a good dog work. And it was a challenge, a real challenge. When I lost a good dog, it was like a member of the family, so.

(Explain to me what is difficult about setting a trap for a mountain lion, as opposed to letting the dogs tree the lion.)

Well, there isn't any difficulty in setting a trap, it's just if you can find a place the lion's gonna come back, or if you had a—say, you had a call come in that a lion had caused a lot of damage, if you could go right in there with the dogs and the lion was still in the area and find a fresh track, you could catch the lion. Otherwords, if you set a trap, the lion may come back in two or three weeks, or he may not come back right there, in that place. He may come back and kill in the sheep over the next canyon or so forth.

(So they're not as specific about coming back?)

Not exactly the same spot, no.

(And what specifically did you have to learn to catch lions without snow?)

10:56

Well, I learned there's a difference in dogs, for one thing. Some dogs couldn't trail on the dry ground, there were certain strains that had it built in. Over the years, I culled the dogs that couldn't do it and finally developed a strain. And then I spent quite a lot of time corresponding with good older hunters, most of 'em from this department. There was Garn Blackburn from down to Mount Carmel Junction, and Jim Morgan were probably two of the better lion hunters in my time. I think I learned a lot from those people.

(When you got really good and got called for problem lions, where did you go in Utah?)

Well, I went into Uintah Basin, can't remember which forest, towards Strawberry Reservoir country, in the Salina Canyon, in the Book Cliffs—well, just all over. [laughs]

(Was it—so they would call you when the other people in the area couldn't get the lion?)

Some of the guys didn't have dogs, and so they would call me, that'd be the reason. [pause] Then they kind of put me on as a troubleshooter. They put another man here to trap coyotes for a while, and that's all I did, was the troubleshooting for the lion, until I had the other problems come, and then I had to change.

(So you did a lot of traveling?)

I did. I was gone away from home a lot. I look back, and as my family grew up, I just wasn't home much. I was gone a lot.

12:48

(Did you do a lot of the camping-in with—in this terrain, did you pack in?)

Yeah, some, we did. I had the little tent camp, I could pull the lot out and stay in it. I camped a lot for the first 30 years.

(Did you have to horseback in?)

Most all the time we used horseback, except when you got a real rough mountain, then it was footwork. There was times when you followed the lion track, and when it got night, you'd build a fire and the next morning you'd follow the lion track again. That was by foot. Of course, that was my younger days. [chuckles]

13:33

(What was the camping like? Did you enjoy it?)

I did. I did. I like to camp. It was great. It was just my life, that kind of things were just my life.

(And did you do it alone, usually? Were you with someone else?)

Sometimes I'd have livestock people with me, but most of the time I was alone. Or if I went to help another trapper, then I would have his company with me.

(You must have had your dogs with you?)

All the time.

(Did you have horses, too?)

Yes, I did. Usually owned a horse all the time. And a pickup.

14:14

(In the beginning, did you use a teepee tent that I've heard about?)

Yes, the first year I started to work, my supervisor brought me over some traps and a teepee tent and said, "There it is." [chuckles] And I hadn't ever been in the desert around the Henry Mountains, but there was quite a lot of herds of sheep wintering down there, that was mostly coyote work there in the desert. That year I lived in the teepee tent down there, when I didn't sleep with the shepherders. [chuckles]

(And what was the teepee tent like?)

It was just a little bit of a tent you set up, big enough to lay a sleepin' bag in. But it was cold. I usually would set it up each night, wherever I was at. But I didn't mind. Sometimes I wouldn't see anybody for a week at a time, but I didn't mind that at t'all. I liked that. It was great.

15:11

(Back to the lions, you stopped keeping track at 500?)

Somewhere around that, yeah.

(I take it that's a very high number?)

It is.

(And tell me a little bit about your work with coyotes.)

Well, in the beginning, we had M-44, which is cyanide, and the 1080 and some strychnine and steel traps. But I really didn't get to be a good coyote trapper for a lot of years 'cause I just didn't have the coyotes to work on. I was doin' mountain lion work. I think I got real good when I finally quit following dogs, when I got older, where I—and then I enjoyed trapping coyotes. I used the steel trap. Today a lot of 'em use snares. I didn't—I used snares a little bit a last few years, but I didn't get real good at it like some of 'em. We've got a lot of antelope and things out here on the sheep country, non-target things, and I was, I was just leery of catching those.

(In the snares?)

Yes. So I didn't really get as good as some of the guys with the snares as a lot of them that's usin' them today. And then when you get older, you're set in your ways. [chuckles] You got your own way to go about things, so.

16:33

(Were there any other animals that you trapped?)

No, that was about it.

(No bear?)

Oh, yes, yes, I hunted bear with the hounds, too.

(Oh, really!)

And I—yes, quite a bit. We have one mountain out here that has quite a lot of bear trouble in cache (?) and I caught a lot of bear with the dogs in that country, too.

(Describe that to me, what that was like and how you did that with the dogs?)

Well, it was about like mountain lion hunting. You found the track and put the dogs on it, but they were much harder to catch than a lion because of their endurance. They could lope ahead of the dogs for hours and hours. And then they would stop and fight on the ground, and it was hard to get in and shoot them. You had to get the wind, because a bear has an extremely good nose. They can wind you a quarter mile away. And some of 'em won't climb a tree like a lion does. But all in all, it was [pause] it was real good. [laughs] That's all I have to say about it. That was a real challenge. Bear were a real challenge.

(Were they more of a challenge than mountain lions?)

Yes.

(Really? How so?)

Just harder to stop, harder for the dogs to stop. A lot more endurance. Some of those chases would last seven or eight hours, and some of 'em you just didn't stop, you just didn't stop the bear.

(You just kept following the dogs who were following the bear?)

Right, yeah.

(Wow. And I know you have a bear trap out in your yard. Describe that and when you had to stop using those.)

I'm not certain when we did stop using those. That was what we used when I first started out, before we got the snares. I can tell you, I believe it was that same trap, the first time I used it, if you'd like me to tell that.

(Uh-huh, please.)

Well, I came home late in the afternoon and I had a cattleman come and said a bear just killed a big two-year-old heifer, Hereford heifer. So I went back out on the mountain with him and we took that bear trap and sure enough, the bear had—it really had a struggle. It was a big—in fact, the heifer was bigger than the bear, although it was a big bear. We built a V-pen. I've thought about that a lot, because nowadays we don't go to all that work. I was just inexperienced. But we built a big V-pen and put a roof on it, just like a house, and left a little opening and put that bear trap in there. We had the bear the next day. That was the first bear I ever caught with a bear trap.

(And a V-pen is just what it says, it's in a V?)

Right. And then we put a top on it so the bear couldn't tear it down to get into the carcass, because I knew he'd come back and feed on the heifer that night.

(And the heifer was in the pen?)

Yes.

(So you caught bears both with dogs and with traps?)

And with snares. I learned to snare bear some, too.

(After the traps were banned?)

Right.

19:39

(How did you find the bears' snares?)

We usually tied them to a tree so they couldn't—or a big drag.

(Were they hard to get used to, to use them, the snares?)

Not really, no. They were pretty simple. [pause] In fact, to snare a bear, if you've got something that the bear's gonna return to, it's the easiest way. And they're not spooky like a coyote. They'll come in to almost anything. But the biggest challenge and thrill was to catch one with dogs. There's easier ways, but that was the challenge.

([chuckles] Was there any—so you caught coyotes, mountain lions, and bears. Any wolves?)

There isn't any wolves in the area, although I did catch a wolf once years—that was probably in the early '70s. I didn't know what had killed the sheep. A sheep man called me and if I remember right there were six or seven dead sheep there. It was in an area I couldn't see tracks, so I set traps back around these kills a ways back, and the next day we had a wolf. And the sheep man had got there before I did in the morning and shot the wolf. But we found out that some fellow had had some wolves in the pen and they had gotten away.

(Oh, so these were not really wild, they were—?)

We didn't know that at a time, but they were the true timber wolf. I was amazed at the size. Other than that, that's the only experience I've had with wolves.

(So in your last years of work, it was mainly coyotes, it sounds like?)

Yes. Yep.

21:35

(Anything special in a challenge with a coyote, to trap?)

Yes, there is. [pause] I like to trap coyotes. It's a challenge. Somebody asked me the secret a while back to catching a coyote, and I said, "The right scent and the right location, you can catch any coyote. It's just finding the right place to set the trap and using good scent."

(That's the key, it sounds like. [pause] You retired just last year?)

It was end of May last year, yeah. [pause] That was 43 years.

(And have you done any other work for Wildlife Services since then?)

No, I haven't. The last two years I just worked temporary, three days a week, although it ended up five days or six anyway. But that's all I was on.

(Mike Bodenchuk, the state director, gave me your name and told me that you were quite the lion hunter. And he also had a story or two about when he was with you. Can you think of any stories about when you took Mike along to capture a mountain lion?)

Nancy, I can't. I like Mike. He did spend a lot of time with me. And I enjoyed Mike's company. But to remember specifics and things, I don't know if I can right now. Probably after this is all over, it'll come to me. But right now I can't.

(Well, and that's OK. After 500, they probably get a little—they kind of blur together, probably. Tell me what you liked best about your work.)

23:46

Well, I like the challenge. I liked the freedom. I was pretty much my own, you might say, boss. [pause] But there's—the challenge was not only that I worked for our department, but I worked for the people, and you knew that there was things that had to be done or it was gonna cost these people a lot of money. [pause] For instance, if you knew they were going on a spring range and there was some coyotes there or some lion living there and so forth, you knew that they were gonna lose a percentage of their lamb crop if you didn't get that work done prior to the time they got in. And people depended on me. And the people here in this valley really treated me good. I was, I didn't have not one enemy. I think it's great, they were great people to work for.

(What did you like least about your work?)

Environmental regulations, more and more. [chuckles]

(And in your time, because there was such a time, how did you see those regulations change?)

Well, one of the biggest changes is when they took toxics away from us, poisons. It hurt the sheep industry a lot. There was places where we weren't effective with the tools we had left, and those people had to quit. And I seen the deer numbers start to drop, right from that time, even to this present day. [pause] Not only that, I noticed other things, like the bobcat population dropped and I really didn't realize all this until each year went by and I could see things. At times I'd find around a dens of coyotes I'd find mountain lion kittens or bobcat kittens. I didn't know they killed those things. So I soon learned that the coyotes has an effect on a lot of wildlife species. I've seen those changes.

26:17

But time changes things. We have to go along with the changes in time, so you learn to adjust and do the best you can with the change as it comes.

(You mentioned the drop in deer and bobcat. In recent years, have you done any work on controlling coyotes to keep the numbers of deer—or get them back up?)

Yes, the last two years while I was on temporary, I trapped on the Henrys, that was the purpose.

(On the where?)

Henry Mountains. But I'm not sure, with steel traps and calling, if you can take enough coyotes to make a difference. I really—we done some aerial work, too, helicopter work. I think in order to have any effect you've got to have a good aerial program, good helicopter program. Because on the ground in a big area I don't think you can take enough numbers with steel traps and snares or M-44 to make that much difference.

(So there has to be more than several tools, even, a bunch?)

Right.

(You mentioned calling coyotes. Did you do a lot of calling?)

I done quite a bit of calling, years ago. I forgot to mention that as one of the tools. Yes, I done quite a bit. I wasn't as good as some of the guys. Some of 'em's really experts. But I done pretty good with it.

(Did you call with your voice?)

I called with my voice and I used several hand calls, too, different kinds.

(You called them "hand calls"?)

Uh, yeah, like the rabbit distress, or a hand call, there's a little horn, it sound like an owl. There's several on the market.

(Did you ever use the mechanical ones that I hear they now have?)

28:25

Uh, yes, I have used 'em, but I didn't like 'em as well as I did just myself.

(How did you learn to call coyotes?)

We had a fellow by the name of Milt McQueary. I imagine Bob talked about him some. Bob sent him over here. I had—I remember that particular herd of sheep was up to about 80 ewes had been killed that winter, and one pair of coyotes had done that. I had tried to trap them down there, and I hadn't caught them. So Bob sent that Milton McQueary over. That was the first I'd seen anything like that work. He showed me how. And he had a dog that trotted out there a ways, and the coyotes, we could see the coyotes in the glasses, and they watched that dog, and when they finally came close enough, he shot one of them. That's how we started. I think he was the pioneer man that started in our program, this Milton McQueary.

(So you learned to call from him?)

I did. That was the first.

(And you found it quite effective?)

Yes. It was a real good tool, especially in the spring when you've got pairs with pups around the den and they'll fight your dogs. It was effective, real good.

(And did you use pup distress calls?)

Yes, I did.

(You mentioned those, too. Any other calling of other animals?)

29:52

No, I've heard of some. The fellow who took my place is doing some with mountain lion. I never did.

(Calling mountain lion?)

Yeah, with a machine. That's new to me. I haven't seen it.

(What did you find most challenging about your work?)

I don't know that there was any one thing. I [pause] I think one of the biggest challenges was that you had a lot of pressure on you, I mentioned this before, to do the work, because these people that you worked for was your friends and your neighbors, and it affected their families if you didn't get the work. That'd be the challenge right there. You had to do that, or you knew what was gonna take place.

(What was one of the most difficult social or political situations you found yourself in?)

I can't answer that. I don't know.

(Did you ever have any—you mentioned environmental regulations. Did you ever have any environmentalist-type people that you had to deal with? Part of the reason I mention that is the other two people that I've interviewed in the last couple days here in Utah mentioned that. Did you ever have any of those kinds of things you had to deal with?)

31:21

Not like those people, 'cause they were in supervisor position, and I didn't really—I, just didn't have much with environmental groups. There was a time or two that I met with a group here, the Aspen Youth people, I killed one of their dogs. But those wasn't big issues like you're talking about.

(So for those of you who were on the line trapping, you didn't have to deal much with that stuff?)

No, not like supervision people.

(That had to be kind of nice.)

It was. [laughs]

(You just had the challenge of doing a good enough job that your friends and neighbors didn't go out of business.)

That and if we made some mistakes, of course, our supervisory people had to answer to somebody for those things, so you had to be careful what you done.

(And you just mentioned accidentally killing a dog.)

Yeah, that happened more than one time. That was just—there's a hazard. When you put out equipment, that's just part of—you try and be as careful as you can, you put up the warning signs and all, try and follow all the regulations, but sometimes those things happen anyway.

(If you can think of a funny situation that happened while you were capturing or handling animals, or something that didn't seem funny at the time but now seems funny?)

You might have to shut that off. [laughs]

([laughs] That's OK. When you were trapping all your mountain lions, any situations where you were attacked or anything like that?)

No, I was never attacked. A couple of times I had dogs killed, and I had 'em frequently bitten and put out of commission for quite a while. There was one thing that happened to me, though, that I think about once in a while. It was in the wintertime, and I was following the dogs, the dogs went on through and I was following their tracks going around the ledge, and I slipped, slipped down the edge of this ledge. It was about a 600-yard drop-off. And I caught on the limb there and I don't know how long I was froze there on that limb. 'Till I finally-

(You were hanging?)

Hanging, yeah. I almost went off. And I've thought about that. If I'd have fell off, I don't know how anybody would've ever found me, because there was no roads or anything in that area. But anyway, I finally got myself out. But it scared me, really scared me.

(So if you'd have dropped, you would have fallen. What did you do, climb back up?)

I finally found a way to climb back up, but it scared me, it really did.

(That would. Was that in this area?)

It was on the Henry Mountains, down here, in the wintertime. Yah, but I was young. I don't know, if that happened to me now, I don't know if I could get out of that situation.

34:44

(What is your favorite lure recipe?)

Uh, gland lure. I used to make it myself from the coyotes. But that Gorman gland lure is real good. And then I like a fox gland lure.

(For a coyote?)

Yes, put it in a place where there's coyotes, seems like they'll come in. And then urine, just coyote urine.

(Did you use anything specific for bears, for bear traps?)

Sometimes a little anise oil. That was about it, I think, other than the animal that they'd killed, sometimes, to draw 'em back.

(How did you used to make the lures?)

35:34

Well, I don't know if I can tell you. I took just parts of the coyote, behind the ears and the tail, put it in bottles. But this Gorman, the last few years, I used that, it was real good lure.

(Did you like making your own lures?)

No, no, I'd rather buy it already made.

([chuckles] Because some people really like that.)

I know they do. I liked—I was real careful with the urine. I like urine from a coyote that you fed the natural feed, not dog food or something else, 'cause it changes the smell. This is maybe a little different for you, too, but I liked to gather up the scat from coyotes in the mountains or vice versa, from the desert, and switch back and forth to use to track, because it changed the smell just enough that it'd really work good on coyotes.

(But now you pretty much buy all your—or you used to?)

The department, the last few years, they bought it and furnished it for us.

(What is your favorite trap to use?)

Just the #3 Victor trap, long spring. Some of 'em like the shorter, but I like the long spring.

(Why do you like it more than others?)

I used the drag a lot more than some of the guys. I like the chain with the hooks on. It seemed like if you got a drag, you didn't twist it, they didn't twist out quite as fast as if they were pegged down solid. Although there's some places you couldn't put a drag because there wouldn't be anything for 'em to dragging on, but—

(So you usually liked a longer drag?)

I did, yes.

(Did you used to make any modifications on traps that you would buy?)

37:29

I didn't. They furnished all my traps, so, I didn't, other than I put a longer chain, a longer drag on some of 'em.

(How have your trapping techniques changed over the years?)

Oh, [pause] I—I was pretty immature when I started out. It just took a long time to learn all those things. I don't know how to tell you that. I was pretty backward. I couldn't catch a coyote when I started workin',

(Really?)

Unless it was a big dumb pup in the fall of the year [chuckles].

(Sounds like you learned pretty fast, though.)

Well, it took two or three years. I think I was even better the last few years I worked than I was years ago, 'cause you get a little more particular and you watch what you're doing a little more. A coyote's got a real sensitive nose, and I learned after they made that we had to abide by the trap law, the check law, every so many hours. I learned to check my traps with field glasses instead of walking up, because if you rubbed one little bush, a lot of times a coyote can smell that on that bush five or six days later. So I learned to—if you can see if your trap's not been disturbed to look at it in field glasses maybe 50 or 75 yards away. You're a lot more effective that way than to walk up and look at that trap.

39:01

(So the checking the traps every 48 hours was a big change.)

It's a big change, and it makes it a lot harder to trap coyotes. 'Cause a coyote is a lot more sensitive to activity there and—

(You mean as you have to keep walking back and forth?)

Yeah, and each time you do you rub your pants on a little bush, all those things affects a coyote. I learned about the scent thing from watching hounds work. You'd be going through the country, and a lion might have rubbed—or walked under a tree in pine needles or rubbed through a bush there ten days or two weeks ago, and the dogs come along there and they didn't do a thing until they smelled those brush there, and they could still smell the scent on there. So then I started watching a little bit more what I was doing about setting traps, because I knew a coyote's nose was just as keen as a good hound. And they're spooky. Little things like that'll spook coyotes. Especially adults, the old adults.

(It doesn't sound like mountain lions were near as spooky about those things.)

No, they're not. No. Nor is a bear that way. They don't pay any attention if you've been there and made a mess or whatever. It don't seem to affect them. But a coyote it does. Real sensitive.

(So it makes it more challenging?)

Yes.

40:27

(What else would have changed over the years? The use of tools? So you had to change some of your trapping techniques 'cause some of your tools went away, it sounded like, some of the poison.)

Except sodium cyanide, and they made a few regulations, but they were still a good tool we could use. Although [pause] the more the land is being used by people, the less—we had to quit using places, you know, where there's public activity, you just don't—I've got to where I don't use the M-44 in the winter, and in the high country, where the people wouldn't normally be, where there's less activity.

(Did you notice a change over the years in the amount of people?)

Oh, yes, oh, yes, every place.

(Really?)

Yes. [pause] Just more people every place you go any more.

(In the early years?)

In the early years I could be a week or ten days and never see a person unless I stopped to a sheep camp. Another thing, in the early years, you stopped at every ranch. People didn't see people often, so you stopped each ranch and you went in and ate with 'em and visited and went on and stopped to the next ranch. That was the only people you seen in those days. It was pretty well from the end of the valley here was dirt road, and not very good road at that.

(In the later years, did you still have the same kind of relationship with the sheep ranchers?)

Yeah, I still had a pretty good relationship, but it wasn't the same as I would say their fathers and grandfathers and stuff. It was a little different, because roads were paved and times changed and there were more people. But the people still treated me just as good, they were real respectful, and I respected them. [pause]

(Did you ever use the livestock protection collar at all that has the 1080 in it?)

Yes, Mike had us do that once, but I can't remember how that come out. [chuckles] We did. I can remember Mike Bodenchuk. I just can't remember how that did. But we did try that once.

43:01

(And speaking of the livestock protection collar, did you ever do any work with the research center?)

No, I didn't.

(No studies or anything like that?)

Not that I can think of. [pause] I'm gettin' to where I forget things, but I can't think of anything right off.

(If one of your grandchildren asked you about any trapping secrets you had, or words of wisdom if they wanted to start trapping, what would you tell them?)

Well, I'd tell them they're wasting their time unless they lived with somebody that knew what they were doing. [laughs]

([laughs] So you'd send 'em along with you or an experienced trapper?)

Yes, I would. To go out on their own, it'd be pretty uphill.

(Any specific hints before they went out with a trapper?)

Oh, I don't know, Nancy. Not that I can think of. Just watch and pay attention to what the professional men would do.

(It sounds like you learned a lot by watching.)

I did, but still, it took me a long time, even though people like Bob Oppenheimer showed me a lot. He was real good. Spent a lot of time with me, had a lot of patience.

44:41

(And he's very good, so you probably learned a lot.)

I did learn a lot from Bob. I respected him. Another thing, back in those early years, quite a group of us started out about the same, and so Bob helped us all. And then probably each one of us were a little better and one thing and another, so we worked together a lot. We knew their families. We were all close, and our families were close, too. Which today I don't see that too much.

(Really?)

No, not like it was then.

(So those of you in the district had certain specialties? You were the lion person?)

Right. And then our families, we got together at times, all of our families and visited. We were close, all of us.

(And over the years you saw that change?)

Yes, I did, yeah. A lot of the ones I started out with's gone, they passed on. Their families are growin' up. [pause] I'd like to think I was friends with all the people in the department, because I like them all. Good people, all of them.

(What will trapping be like in the future, in 25 or so years?)

I question if they'll be using steel traps.

(Really? Why?)

Ah, people think it's inhumane. I really don't know what it'll be. I've wondered that, too, because there's been so many changes in my time. So I really don't know. And I wonder about the livestock on public ground. They're making more restrictions for livestock users on public ground all the time. I wonder in another 20 years if they'll be livestock on public land. There's more demand—people demand other uses for public land, more so all the time. So those things, I don't know.

46:57

(And the flip side would be, if livestock producers can't use public land, where will they be in 25 years?)

They'll be out of business. In little places like this valley, it would make a lot of difference, because only 3% of the land in this valley is privately owned, so people depend on the public land all the time to run livestock.

(So most of your work was on public land?)

The biggest part of it, yes.

(How did you see that change over the years in terms of regulation?)

Well, I seen a lot of the public land officials, they were more interested in what were doing and they made regulations.

(In later years, or in early years?)

Later years, places they didn't want us to work because of their concerns with people and things.

(So you had to do more with regulations?)

Right, yes.

47:56

(That had to make the work more difficult.)

It was, those was the things I was tryin' to bring out a little bit ago. Yes, it made a lot of difference. [pause] Most of those people were good enough people, but some of 'em didn't understand our work, and they didn't understand the consequences to the livestock operators if we didn't do the work. That was the problem. When they made that regulation to keep us off of here at a certain time or off of there, they didn't realize the effect it was causing the people. So I really think, for the better trappers on this department were the people that was raised up around livestock, because they knew a lot of the situations prior to the time they ever started work, doing this type of work.

(And that's a help?)

A big help, yes.

(Were you raised around livestock?)

Yes, I was.

(What kind?)

Both sheep and cattle.

(So you knew firsthand what it was like if—?)

I did.

(—if a coyote took five of your lambs.)

[pause] Or I've seen lots of mountain lion kills, 30s and 40s. At one time, in one kill, over a 100. 102, I think that time.

(One lion?)

Two lions done that, walked through a herd of sheep and killed that many. But I've seen lots of them in the 30s and 40s. And those lions didn't get in there and kill for food. They killed for pleasure. They were just playing, just go through and bite them.

(And that's different than coyotes, usually?)

Right, yeah.

(Did you notice then an increase with mountain lion predation when they had cubs, or did it make any difference?)

No, it didn't seem to make too much difference, unh-unh. Back in those years, I did notice one thing, there was lots of deer. I'll go back to when we were using poison. I wanted to make that point to you, I forgot about it. We were putting out these halves of sheep with 1080, and it didn't seem to affect the lion population, or the bobcat population, very little, because they're not a carrion eater. That way they usually kill their own food.

(And what kind of poison was it?)

It was the 1080. It just didn't seem to bug them. I'm not sayin' that occasionally one didn't eat it, but it would have been very rare. It was a good safe poison. We may have been killing some bear, because I can see the bear population has really increased in this area in the last, say, 15 or 20 years.

(So they might have accidentally—?)

They might have done. We wouldn't have known, because that poison didn't take effect right there where your bait was, they went off some place. But it was a safe poison. It didn't kill birds. It was really a good—

(1080?)

Yeah. It was a good, safe poison.

(It doesn't sound like much worked, though, with mountain lions except dogs, really, were the most effective?)

That was the most effective, yes.

51:07

(Did most of the people, trappers, trap mountain lions, or did they get so they called you as a specialist?)

Some of 'em would try to trap, and if they could catch one in a trap, why, they'd solve the problem. If they didn't, they would call for me to come.

(And I would assume mountain lion country is very rugged, typically?)

Very rugged, and the habits of mountain lion is—sometimes I've started dogs early in the morning and maybe I've trailed 15, 20 miles that day and not caught up to 'em, because they walk, they travel a lot, take lots of distances, so it's a challenge in that part.

(So you would be trailing the dogs that would be trailing the mountain lion for 20 miles, and still not find it?)

Yes, that's happened a lot of times.

(So then what would you do?)

Well, I'd usually look at the country and try and maybe the next day cut roads or make a big loop to try and get ahead or try and cut a track some place. Or sometimes, when it come night, I built a fire under a tree and stayed there until morning and went on with the tracking.

(So you would try to track them, or send the dogs to get their scent?)

Both. Usually I'd find the track and show the dogs where they were at.

(Any specific habits you noticed in mountain lions?)

52:31

Well, yeah, there's a lot of things. I don't know how to explain that. About the way they scratch—there's no set time limit on—a lion'll make a big circle, and he may come back in two weeks through the country in the same place, or he may come back six months. But as he goes through the country, usually under a big ponderosa pine or a different type of pine on a high

ridge, he leaves his scratch marks and urinates. And if he comes back through there in six months, more than likely he'll hit that place as he comes back through. And as you hunt an area, over the years you learn these places, and if you're goin' into there, you go check those trees to see if your dogs can start a track in those places, 'cause you've got that in your memory, where those places are, if you're familiar with an area. Of course, when you go into a strange area, then you're handicapped a little bit that way, because you don't know those places. But I hunted this area enough, and these mountains around me, that I knew all those places. After 10 or 15 years of it, I knew all those old places, scratch places, I called them.

(Do mountain lions have territories, the same as coyotes?)

Uh, no, I don't think so. Although I have seen where one lion has killed the other, more than one time I've seen that, they get in a fight. You could call that, I guess, territorial, but I don't know that that lion might have just happened on the other male lion. For instance, when they run the studies here, they've run a few lion studies in this area, some of these lion would change mountain ranges about every 30 or 60 days, complete new mountain ranges. So that shows you how much they'll migrate and travel.

(Wow, that's a lot! That's a big area. Did you ever trap a problem one that, like, went from mountain range to mountain range that you had to keep following?)

54:46

Uh, yes, I did. I've had that happen. There was one particular lion, big lion, and I felt a little bad. They had a lion study going on, and they had a big ____ lion collared. I visited this—his name was Arnold Button, who had done the lion study. That lion would leave the Boulder Mountain and go up to the Henrys, and then he'd go down to our tropic center in Utah. And they had the collar on him, so they could tell. There was a place down here the other side of Torrey that pastured a bunch of sheep, and the lion got in there and killed about 20 of them. They called me and I went down there and I caught this lion, and it happened to be the one with the collar on.

(And you shot and killed it?)

I killed it. I hated to kill it. I didn't know what to do, and it made those people feel bad. I was legal to do it, I was doing the right thing, but it bothered me a little to have to kill that lion, it did.

(Because it was collared?)

Well, and I knew how much it meant to those people. They followed that all the time, it was part of their study.

(Sure. What study was that?)

55:49

It was just a lion study. They're doing some of that now, too, the Game Department is, in different places in the state.

(Just to see where they go—?)

Population, movement, those kind of things.

(Did you see mountain lion populations change over the years?)

The last 10 or so years, I have seen it drop a lot.

(Oh, really! Drop?)

Mm-hmm. Because there's lots of hunters.

(Oh, recreational?)

Right, [pause] When they put 'em on as a game animal, it brought more interest from people. I used to know practically all the lion hunters in the state of Utah. I could probably count 'em on my fingers in my early years. Now every town's got half a dozen.

(Really?)

A city like Richfield and so forth, yeah, there's lots of—even in this little town here, there's people with dogs. It's quite a recreational sport now, seasons. In my time, there was no season, they were the same as a predator.

56:57

Going back to—I mentioned Jim Worthen and Lauren (?) Blackburn. I can remember, I'd worked a couple years or so. They used to send out a little sheet, our department did, what each guy caught each month, so many coyotes or bobcat or so many mountain lion. And when I got to where I was catching more than those guys, I was really proud of myself. [laughs]

([laughs])

Because I was younger, a kid, really.

(So it made you feel really good. [laughs])

Yeah. [laughs] 'Cause those guys were good. They were old hands at it, professional, really getting professional at it.

(So you learned well?)

I like to think so. I took pride in it, in what I did.

(And did very well, it sounds like.)

Well, I don't think you're gonna get two hours of this [chuckles]

([laughs] What do you see as the biggest challenges facing people in your line of work?)

Well, I don't think there's a demand for our profession like there used to be. There used to be lots and lots of sheep herds. And the trend the last 30 years is downhill.

(For sheep?)

For sheep, and in my time we done most of our work for sheep people in this part of the state. So I think that's one thing, there just isn't a demand for our work.

(Any other challenges?)

[pause]

(Regulatory challenges?)

Yeah, there'd be all those things. [pause] I think the more people that use the forests and things like that, the more regulations we're gonna have. And time changes. We can't do anything about those things. That's just part of the changes of time.

(And more challenges with all the people, as you said, danger.)

You just don't set equipment out where you've got people. They've got pets and those things. It's hard to go any place in the summer now where you don't have people with pets.

(Probably in the winter, almost, too.)

Well, some of the places.

(You mentioned, in terms of biggest challenge, sheep. What about cattle?)

59:20

In the desert country, cattle people had some problems in their calving, but not like the sheep people. Their losses wasn't near as big. And we had some—oh, maybe a half a dozen bear fields in one place around here on the Boulder Mountain in cattle each spring, it's been a history of that. And this still goes on every year. But it's not like sheep people go out and lose 20% of their lambs, or 30% through a season. That's the difference.

(You were mentioning Boulder Mountain problem with bear. That's usual?)

It has been a history in all my time, since I started, although there's more bear there now.

(Oh, really?)

Yes.

(Why is that?)

Well, it could be that prior to '72 they were eating some poison. It could be. I don't know that. Or the habitat might have changed out here some. But there is more bear out here now, a lot more than there used to be.

(So how did you-all deal with that as trappers? Did you go in that area to snare more bear, then?)

Just the problem bear is all. I don't know that—oh, I might have caught a few more when I was hunting with dogs out there than we do now. I think this trapper that took my place caught three or four there last summer with snares. I was probably taking more than that when I was hunting with dogs, but I don't know that that's the reason the population's changed. That mountain is 300 miles around, if you take the base, and we were hunting that little area out there around 20 miles of country where the depredation was. So I don't know how that could affect the bear population very much, where it was mostly problem bear. So I don't really know for sure why the bear are increasing, but there is more bear. More people sees 'em all the time. A lot of bears don't cause any problems, either. That's the reason we only work on the problem bear.

61:39

(How hard was it to get the problem animal?)

Well, sometimes we didn't. Some of those old rough—I call 'em “devil bear”—they'd beat a pack of dogs right up and you just couldn't get a shot at 'em. They'd just fight and run. But in those days, I didn't snare very much. I had the dogs, and I just didn't think about settin' a snare. If you had a good pack of hounds, you lost some of your self-pride if you went out there and was gonna take a bear another way, you know? [chuckles]

([laughs] How hard was it selectively to catch a coyote?)

Oh, sometimes it was real hard. Although I believe a person can catch any coyote, like I told you, you had to find the right place and the right scent and give it time, where the coyote couldn't tell you'd been in there. But sometimes other factors bother us when you're trapping coyotes. You have livestock movin' in there, you can't keep your traps set, or the deer come into a winter range and there's lots of deer and you can't set there. There's just so many factors. Or there's people. That's the things that makes a difference when you have a real challenge to catch a pair of coyotes. Or if you're calling them and make a mistake and they come in on the wrong side and wind you, they remember that. Those are the things that make the challenge on that.

(What about mountain lions in terms of selectivity?)

63:21

[pause] Well, if you can just get to where the lion's been the night before, you can catch him, unless you get in some bad ledges, like if you look out the window over there, I've been out in some of that country, when you had to boost the dogs up over shelf after shelf and that lion could get up faster than you could boost the dogs, he'd get away.

(So you'd have to wait till the next day?)

Yeah, or go round the other side of the mountain and hope you could get his track as he went through there, 15 miles in there, wherever. You'd think of those things. If you couldn't catch him

there, you'd make big loops until you finally, finally get a track. And there's been places where they've sent me where I didn't—where I was unable to—you know, those lions had killed a lot of sheep and then they'd gone some place, and I wasn't familiar with the range of mountains and I'd hunt around that herd of sheep day after day and they'd never come back. Maybe I'd come home and in three weeks they'd call again and the lions had been back again. So there's those things.

64:25

(And from what you said about lion habitat, that would not be unusual.)

No, it isn't, no.

(And because you didn't live in that area, it was hard to do that.)

Yeah. If you know the area like I was tellin' you, like I can go find the scratches and stuff, if you know the area, it makes lots of difference. But if you don't, it's just like takin' a person into a strange city.

(And you hope you get lucky!)

Yeah. [laughs]

([laughs] What other hobbies or interests do you have?)

Well, hunting's been my interest. I've got a little bunch of sheep and a few calves now.

(You raise them?)

Yes.

(Do you still trap for pleasure?)

I done a little bit last winter, not too much. I don't like to run competition with the man they put in this area. I can remember how it bothered me to have people in trapping where I—especially when I was tryin' to take problem coyotes. It makes it a little harder. So I kind of like to—I respect him, I respect his—this is his district now, so if I do trap a little this winter, I'm gonna get away from where he's doing his work. I probably will do just a little this winter, not much, just a little.

(And you still hunt? No hunting?)

Ah, I haven't hunted dogs now for quite a while, although I've got a boy that's doing the same thing I did, only he's not working for the government, so I'm gonna go with him a little this winter, I think.

(Does he have the same strain of hounds?)

He has my old strain. And the guy they've got doing lion and bear work, Kelly Joe Wright, I don't know whether that was mentioned to you, he's got my old strain of dogs. And they're in Colorado and they're in Arizona and they're all over.

(You must have had a very good strain!)

A good strain of dogs, yeah.

(And you developed them yourselves?)

[pause] Well, I don't know if I developed 'em. I studied 'em a lot. I've hunted all breeds of hounds, but I found that I liked the red bone dog. I guess Jim Worthen the one who started me with that. He gave me a pup that was a red bone dog and I liked so well, that's the reason I—but I bought, I bought a pup from a person in Minnesota. In fact, I bought two or three, and there was only one that turned out very good, and I kept it. And then I was acquainted with an old bear hunter out of Stockton, California that had hunted the Sierra Nevadas, and I got some of his strain of dogs. They were red bone dogs, and I started with that cross. And then I culled and I kept the better ones and culled over the years until I finally had a good strain.

(Do you still have any dogs?)

I've got one over there that I've always got, and that's it. [chuckles]

67:24

(We're just about to the end of my questions. Do you have anything you'd like to add, anything you've thought of while we've been talking?)

Oh, not necessarily. I do think this is probably the best government department there is.

(Really!)

Yes.

(What makes you say that?)

Just better people in it, just darn good people. And they're doing something for someone else all the time. [pause] And they're friendly people, honest people.

(And it sounds like you really liked your job.)

I did, yeah, I did. I liked it.

(Well, good. Well, thank you very much.)

Probably didn't help you much, but— [chuckles]

68:08 End file 1

File 2

00:00

(OK, we've started the interview again because Phil wanted to tell me about his wages when he started.)

I hope I'm correct on this, if I remember right, I think that I started work for \$225 a month, and that was the year I lived in the teepee tent, the first year. And then they gave me \$75 a month and I had to buy my own pickup and my gas and pay my own expenses. But that was how tough times was when I first started. Things was really, really hard. And I wasn't the only one, all the people they put on about my same time, we all had a hard time with their families and things. Things were real tough. And that's another thing that's really changed from then till now. Things are a lot better financially for—the wages are better and the per diem and all those things are a lot better now than they were then.

00:59 End file 2

File 3

00:00

(And you mentioned something about Bob bringing a dog over for mountain lions.)

Oh, he brought a dog over. He come to help me catch a mountain lion, and I think he had three dogs. He had a buckskin plot dog and I talked to him to sell me that dog before he left. He charged me \$100, which, that was a half a month's wages. But I was so proud of that dog, and I started catchin' lion then, too. I finally got a dog that I could put a pup with and I could catch a lion that made a track in the snow. So I appreciated that with Bob. I know Bob kind of hated to let me have that dog. [laughs]

([laughs])

But he could see the situation I was in here.

(So that's good.)

Thank you.

(All right.)

00:44 End file 3. End of interview.